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FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

STATE FOR IO/UNESCO DOUGLAS ROHN, FOR IO/S GEORGE ABRAHAM,
FOR OES LIZ TIRPAK

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/17/2016

TAGS: AORC SCUL SOCI UNESCO KSA

SUBJECT: UNESCO: AMBASSADOR USES JANUARY 16 MEETING WITH
DG MATSURA TO PRESS US GOALS IN PROGRAMS, HIRING; PRIZE TO
CHAVEZ A KEY CONCERN

¶1. (U) Classified by N. Cooper Acting Deputy Chief of
Mission, reasons 1.4.(D)

¶2. (C) Summary and Comment: Ambassador Louise V. Oliver's January 16 meeting with UNESCO DG MATSUURA focused on USG program priorities including literacy (and the Honorary Ambassador role of the First Lady) and U.S. participation in the review panel for the Social and Human Sciences and the Natural Sciences sectors. The Ambassador and the DG also exchanged views on the upcoming MOST conference in Buenos Aires. On personnel matters, the Ambassador underlined the importance of ensuring that the next Assistant Director General for Culture does not come from a country that was a prime mover behind the Cultural Diversity Convention. The Ambassador stressed Washington's concern over the recent decision to award UNESCO's Marti Prize to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez; the DG expressed regret at the decision, but appeared to have been trapped; the nomination had been advanced by seven member states.

¶3. (C) The meeting was substantive and cordial, covering a lot of ground. The Ambassador told the DG that Washington is willing to support continued active participation at UNESCO as long as no further issues/debates -- similar to the Cultural Diversity Convention -- cause major concern. The DG clearly understands what is at stake. He emphasized that he has to make decisions that he can defend. The Ambassador stressed in turn her determination to ensure that the DG understands in advance where potential problems may lie -- from the U.S. point of view -- so that he can manage potential areas of discord appropriately. End Summary and Comment.

DG SENDS KUDOS TO U.S. DELEGATION TO CARIBBEAN TSUNAMI CONCLAVE

¶4. (U) The DG opened the meeting by praising the quality of the U.S. delegation to the recent Barbados IOC meeting to establish a tsunami mitigation system in the Caribbean. Describing the delegation as "excellent", he gave the Ambassador a copy of the speech he delivered at the conference, saying that he intends to send a note to the First Lady, given the interest that she expressed in tsunami issues during their meeting in February 2005.

EDUCATION: A LEADING ROLE FOR THE FIRST LADY

¶5. (U) Literacy: The Ambassador noted the First Lady's interest in taking a more high-profile role in UNESCO's literacy program. The DG reported that Education Assistant Director Peter Smith had told him about the First Lady's visit to Nigeria; he expressed regret that there was not much to see on the ground to represent UNESCO's investment in Nigerian schools, since UNESCO works at a higher, policy level in that country. Ambassador Oliver noted that Nigeria is in the first group of target countries for the literacy program, and that there will doubtless be other opportunities for the First lady to make similar visits in the future. The DG reported that Education ADG Smith had also mentioned a possible high-level conference for the spouses of Presidents in May. The Ambassador explained that that is part of an effort to build political will in countries for literacy initiatives, but that no firm decision has been made and no date determined yet. (Note: The Ambassador asked ADG Smith whether a September meeting in New York would work and he replied that it would as long as the date was not too close to that of the September 26-October 12 Executive Board. End Note.)

THE MARTI PRIZE TO CHAVEZ: A POINT OF DISCORD

¶6. (C) Marti Prize: The Ambassador told the DG that the decision to bestow UNESCO's Marti prize on Venezuela President Hugo Chavez is of great concern to Washington. The DG said he did not know about it until after it had happened. The Ambassador replied that this constituted a

direct challenge to both the DG and U.S.: A challenge to the DG because it was done without his knowledge, and to the U.S. because Chavez was chosen. The DG said that his first instinct had been to set aside the decision, but that he was advised by his staff not to do so, in part because six other countries had joined in the nomination; he agreed that it was a "coordinated set-up". The Ambassador said that the DG should have overturned the decision, because this was the first time a UNESCO prize had been given to a politician. The DG demurred, saying that other UNESCO prizes, like its Peace prize, had been awarded to politicians. The Ambassador stressed that if UNESCO gives prizes to politicians, the decision-making process must be tightly controlled: UNESCO is supposed to be a technical agency working at the experts' and technical level, and not a political body, as in New York. The import of the issue is larger than that of prizes. What is UNESCO's responsibility for prizes, institutes, etc. that bear the UNESCO name? UNESCO cannot allow its name to be used and then claim it has no responsibility for decisions made on prizes and for work done by institutes bearing its name. UNESCO cannot allow its name to be used and then claim it has no responsibility for the consequences. The Ambassador assured the DG that she would raise these questions at the January 19 Executive Board Meeting with the DG. The DG concluded by saying that he thought he had made a mistake in allowing Chavez's name to go forward and that he would try to minimize the impact of the prize. He noted the involvement of ADG for Social and Human Sciences Pierre Sane in the Chavez decision, expressing his displeasure.

¶7. (C) The DG said that he had visited several of the Caribbean islands as part of his trip to Barbados for the tsunami conference, including St. Lucia and St. Kitts, now

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on the Executive Board. He noted that Cuba and Venezuela are making a big push in the Caribbean by offering free medical care and flying patients for treatment and doctors for training to Cuba for free. He said the U.S. should be concerned about this and that we should promote our positive involvement in Caribbean tsunami work. He noted Japan's increased focus on the Caribbean.

NATURAL AND SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES: U.S. ROLE IN REVIEW

¶8. (C) Science Review: The Ambassador asked about the planned review of the SHS and Natural Science sectors -- mandated by the October 2005 General Conference -- querying the DG on when decisions will be made on membership. The DG replied that the delay was due to the fact that some geographical groups had been slow in submitting names: GRULAC has just submitted its nominations, and the African group submitted only one name despite being asked for two. The first meeting of the Review panel will take place in late February 2006, so membership decisions will be made before then. DG said many Ambassadors have sought meetings with him to push their candidates, but that NSF Deputy Director Olsen would definitely figure on the panel. (Note: Group I submitted the names of seven candidates. Given the paucity of candidates from the Africa Group, might Washington have a name to suggest? End Note.)

¶9. (C) MOST: The Ambassador expressed concern about the size (more than 1,000 participants invited) and planned high profile of the February 2006 MOST meeting that will take place in Buenos Aires and several other Latin American cities. She indicated that the outcome document will be of critical importance. The U.S. does not want to see an expansion of this initiative. Although we recognize that social sciences are an important part of the sciences, we do not want to see the MOST program expanded as it is not a priority for UNESCO. She informed the DG that the U.S. would send a State Department officer and a National Commission member to the meeting. The DG responded that he planned to send Deputy Director General Barbosa to the meeting to "keep control of it." He added that he had asked SHS ADG Sane to invite more Americans.

PERSONNEL ISSUES CRUCIAL TO SET THE STAGE FOR U.S. OBJECTIVES

¶10. (C) ADG Culture: Referring to her December 2005 conversation with the DG, The Ambassador reiterated USG concern about the choice of the new ADG for Culture. Unlike the Chavez decision -- which involved other players -- the ADG decision is the DG's alone to make, and he will be held responsible for it. The Ambassador underlined concerns about the symbolism of the choice, citing rumors that the position was "wired" for Francoise Riviere. The DG denied the rumors, saying that Riviere knew that she might not be chosen, and that the French government was not pushing her as a candidate. The Ambassador remarked that if this latter assertion were reported to Washington, few would believe it. The DG responded that he would insist on professional qualifications, and that there are ten candidates for him to

consider (Comment: same number cited by current ADG Bouchenaki. End Comment.) Ambassador Oliver expressed the hope that there is a qualified candidate for the position who is not currently working for UNESCO and who does not come from a country that was a key proponent of the Cultural Diversity Convention. If this is not the case, the position should be re-competeted. It makes more sense to take extra time and choose the right person -- as was done in recruiting the ADG for Education -- than to choose the wrong person and have ongoing problems, the Ambassador counseled.

¶11. (C) Other personnel issues: The Ambassador noted that the Capacity Building P5 position in Science Sector has still not been re-advertised, and told the DG that the U.S. will put forward a strong candidate. The DG advised that the U.S. encourage more than one strong candidate to apply for the position.

The Ambassador urged that the Democracy P5 position in the Information and Communication be competed externally, as it is a key position for the U.S., given our focus on democracy and the total absence of Americans in high-level positions in the CI Sector.

The Ambassador expressed concerns about the process for recruiting the D1 Human Rights position in SHS, noting that that a highly qualified U.S. candidate had not made the short list. Although we support a transparent hiring process, the fact is that those interviewing at the preliminary stages might have different criteria than the DG and might eliminate the wrong people. DG recalled that in fact current ADG for Education Peter Smith had originally been eliminated. He said that he has the authority to request that candidates be brought back into competition at the D1 level, and that he would take a close look at this U.S. candidate.

The DG reported that he plans to consolidate the staffs of the General Conference and the Executive Board because the staff of the General Conference works hard only during the General Conference and had little to do the rest of the time.

OLIVER